



Fact Sheet

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control • www.scdhec.gov

Ricin

What is ricin?	<p>Ricin is a toxin, or poison, that can be made from the waste left over from processing castor beans. It works by getting inside the cells and preventing them from making proteins the body needs. A person can be poisoned by ricin by inhaling, by ingesting with food or water, or by injection. The poison may be in the form of a powder, mist or pellet.</p> <p>Ricin poisoning is not contagious; it cannot be spread from person to person.</p>
What are the symptoms?	<p>Symptoms of ricin poisoning depend on the <i>route of exposure</i> to the toxin. When swallowed with food or water, symptoms <i>include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain. Severe ricin poisoning may progress to dehydration, kidney failure, liver failure and shock..</i></p> <p><i>When ricin is inhaled, symptoms may be similar to pneumonia</i>, including fever, cough, tightness in the chest, difficulty breathing, and nausea. If someone is exposed to high doses of the poison, water may accumulate in the lungs and the skin may take on a bluish tinge due to lack of oxygen.</p> <p>When a ricin pellet is injected into the body, symptoms includes pain and tissue damage at the injection site, tiredness, muscle pain, followed by vomiting, renal failure, liver failure and shock.</p> <p><i>Symptoms from ricin exposure usually begin after about 4 to 8 hours. Shock, organ failure and death may follow</i> within 36 – 72 hours <i>of a severe exposure</i>. If someone lives longer than five days after the exposure to ricin, that person will probably not die.</p>
How is ricin treated?	<p>There is currently no vaccine to protect against ricin. Also, since ricin is a poison, antibiotics or antiviral medicines are not effective. There is no known antitoxin effective against ricin. Treatment is <i>intensive supportive care</i> such as <i>intravenous (IV) fluids to maintain hydration, artificial ventilation</i> to provide help breathing, <i>symptomatic treatment</i> and <i>local wound care</i>.</p>
How do people catch this disease?	<p>Accidental exposure to ricin is not <i>not common despite commercial use of the castor bean..</i> Exposure to ricin would most likely result only from a deliberate criminal or terrorist act. Ricin poisoning is not contagious; it cannot spread from person to person.</p>
What should I do if I have been exposed to ricin?	<p>There is no reliable test to confirm exposure to ricin. If you suspect you have been exposed to the poison, leave the area where the ricin was released, get into fresh air, and call 911 and the poison control center at 1-800-222-1222.</p> <p>Remove clothing that might be contaminated and place it in a plastic bag. Do not remove your clothes by pulling them over your head, cut them off if needed. Contaminated skin should be washed with soap and water. If you suspect that ricin has been ingested, do not induce vomiting. <i>Go to the nearest hospital emergency room.</i></p>

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL

Region 7

Serving Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester Counties

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